

The regional dynamics of internal migration intensities in Italy

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Abstract

This paper considers internal migration in Italy in terms of current patterns and longer term trends in migration intensity. It systematically reviews the Italian situation by considering internal migration patterns by citizenship and gender using a geography of 611 local labour market areas (LLMAs), distinguishing between short- and long-distance moves. Attention is given, in particular, to how migration intensities have changed between the categories of LLMAs and across different demographic subgroups. The paper also provides descriptive analyses of the influence on migration patterns of the persistent socio-economic disparities, which exist between LLMAs. Finally, it discusses the role of delayed youth transitions from home, showing how this phenomenon—also observed in other countries—manifests itself in the Italian national and regional contexts.

KEYWORDS

citizenship, correlation analysis, drivers of internal migration, gross migraproduction rate, internal migration, Italy, local labour market areas, migration distance, migration trends

1 | INTRODUCTION

Internal migration has always played an important role in the development of Italian society, but the peak of its importance was achieved in the years of the economic boom of the fifties and sixties of the last century with the long-distance migration from the North East and the South to the industrial areas of the North West and to Rome (Bonifazi, 2013a; Coorti & Sanfilippo, 2009; Gallo, 2012; Golini, 1974). These internal movements were linked to the massive economic and demographic growth of urban areas and to the detriment of the rural ones in the Apennines and in the *Mezzogiorno*, partly determined by the strong demand for young male workers in the factories of the industrial triangle of the North West. In this period, the migratory flows between the *Mezzogiorno* and the Centre-North became one of the most important characteristics of the Italian internal migration model, attracting a great deal of academic and political

debate. Regularly, the focus of these analyses has been on the subordinate position of the *Mezzogiorno* (e.g., Bonifazi, 2013b; Impicciatore & Strozza, 2016).

With the decline of the Fordist model and with the economic crises of the 1970s, internal mobility decreased. Subsequently, the economic recovery of the 1980s and the development of the Third Italy¹ did not cause, as in the past, a strong growth in the demand for labour and did not stimulate a new rise in internal migration flows, because the production processes were not so labour intensive as in the period of mass production (Bonifazi, 2013a). In the 1990s, however, the intensity of internal migration started to grow again, if only slowly and lasting only about 15 years until the global financial crisis (GFC) and associated Great Recession of 2008. Indeed, recently, the crude rates are more or less on the same level as recorded at the beginning of this century but remain higher than in the first half of the 1990s (Bonifazi, 2017). The new upward trend in internal migration intensities was mainly driven by short-distance movements, though the flows from the South of the country contributed.

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The main novelty of internal mobility in the last 30 years has been the growing role of the foreign population (Bonifazi, Heins, & Tucci, 2014, 2015; Bonifazi, Heins, Licari, & Tucci, 2016; Gallo, 2012). In fact, the contribution of foreigners increased continuously until 2013, when it reached 18% of all changes of residence between Italian municipalities—a value that has remained quite stable more recently. Moreover, the foreigners' propensity to change residence, even though declining over the years, is still much higher than that of Italian citizens (Bonifazi, Heins, & Tucci, 2012; De Filippo & Strozza, 2011)—now about 2.3 times higher compared with about 4 times higher in 2004. The reasons behind the higher internal mobility of foreigners can be traced to the dynamics of the immigration process and to the greater precariousness of their living conditions, especially regarding housing and employment.

The last quarter of a century has thus been characterised by an upward trend in internal migration intensities that has been halted only partially by the recent economic and financial crisis. This makes the Italian case rather peculiar in the international context, where the decline of internal migration intensities appears a general feature (Champion, Cooke, & Shuttleworth, 2018). Another aspect that makes the Italian situation distinctive is that Italy, in comparison with many other developed countries, presents a quite low intensity of internal migration (Bell et al., 2015). Other peculiarities in its internal migration include the high out-migration rates in well-off areas and low rates in areas with high unemployment; the age patterns, which show a clear delay in the young-adult migration peak and the absence of a retirement migration peak; and the double age peak for young and again older adults in the migration profiles of foreign women (Bonifazi, Heins, & Tucci, 2018).

This paper builds on previous research by its authors and others who have studied Italy's internal migration patterns from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Bonifazi and Heins (2000) follow an approach that can be categorised as population geography, while Panichella (2012) provides a comprehensive overview of the sociological approach to the study of Italian internal migration patterns comparing the sociodemographic composition of migration flows over time. This work confirms earlier findings by Pugliese (2006) that education and social background are playing an important role in internal migration decisions, especially regarding the South to Centre-North migration flows. In Bubbico, Morlicchio, and Rebggiani (2011), several Italian scholars published contributions on the general state and specific aspects of internal migrations in Italy.

Recent economic analyses of Italy's interregional migration patterns are found in Biagi and Dotzel (2018) and Faggian, Corcoran, and Partridge (2015). Biagi, Faggian, and McCann (2011) present an econometric analysis of the migration flows between the Italian provinces in 2001–2002 using economic, social, and environmental variables. In their analysis, separate models are estimated according to the distance of migration flows because “a migration model with all flows included is probably misspecified in that it is likely to be mixing up quite different migration phenomena” (Biagi et al., 2011, p. 123). Labour market characteristics or economic variables in general seem to influence the long-distance migration flows, confirming a

disequilibrium model in this case, whereas shorter distance migration flows are likely to be more influenced by housing market forces.

Applying a gravity model on time series from 1970 to 2005 of interregional migration flows, Piras (2017, p. 596) concludes that “macroeconomic variables (per capita GDP and unemployment) are the main drivers of migration flows in the long run as previously found in the literature,” underlining the role played by human capital especially in the origin regions (see also Di Berardino, D'Ingiullo, Quaglione, & Sarra, 2019). However, Faini, Galli, Gennari, and Rossiet (1997) and Faggian, Rajbhandari, and Dotzel (2017) discuss missing relationship between unemployment rates and internal migration when using regions and provinces. Already Fielding (2012) points out that the relationship between unemployment and migration does not always follow the apparent economic logic and argues that the unemployed often lack the social and economic resources to realise an out-migration from areas of high unemployment.

In view of the very substantial and persistent socio-economic differences between regions that affect the intensities and patterns of Italy's internal migration (see also Svimez, 2019), this paper has the primary aim of examining the regional dynamics of internal migration in order to identify how the different areas of the country fit into the national pattern just outlined. By analysing the sociodemographic and geographic detail of Italy's migration patterns at the level of local labour market areas (LLMAs) and distinguishing between shorter and longer distance moves, we can gain further insights into the drivers of low internal migration intensities in Italy. This ambition is pursued through a detailed descriptive analysis taking citizenship, gender, and age into consideration (Section 3). Next, in Section 4, some possible socio-economic factors influencing the regional internal migration patterns are discussed, including family structures, aspects of human capital, and labour market considerations like unemployment. Finally, Section 5 sets out our main conclusions. Before that, however, Section 2 describes the data used, explaining their strengths and weaknesses and illustrating the methodological choices that form the basis of the detailed analysis that follow.

2 | DATA AND METHODS

Statistics on internal migration flows in Italy are based on the changes of residence between its 8,000 or so municipalities that are collected as administrative data. The individual administrative forms are collected in each municipality and report on the origin and the destination of the migration as well as on the main sociodemographic characteristics of migrants. Only the legal resident population is included. Non-European Union (EU) citizens must by law provide a residence permit to be included in the population registers.

Annual data on the internal migration exchanges taking place between municipalities during 2002–2016 are aggregated to LLMA level and are available by citizenship (Italian and foreign),² gender (women and men), and 5-year age groups from 0–4 to 70–74 and 75 years and older. The population by citizenship, gender, and age provided by Italian National Institute of Statistics (Istat) on a yearly

basis and realigned after the 2011 population census serve as denominator.³ The data can generally be considered of good quality. While special challenges are caused by the foreign population because of their usually less stable living and working arrangements, the situation has probably improved in recent years as they have become more settled. Also, it is important to note that the number of migrations recorded was markedly higher for 2012, which is due to changes in administrative procedure introduced through a specific law.⁴

The LLMA defined by Istat (2015a) offer the possibility to take stock of the organisation of the Italian national territory on the basis of the relationships between individuals and their social and economic context. The geography of LLMA is based on the daily commuting patterns between municipalities as observed in the 2011 Population and Housing Census (Italian National Institute of Statistics [Istat], 2015a). The analysis of internal migration flows at the territorial level of LLMA should provide new insights into the phenomenon because it increases their interpretative capacity in demographic and socio-economic terms. In fact, LLMA allow taking into account diversity within traditional administrative units aggregating municipalities according to the actual economic relations between them. The nearly 8,000 Italian municipalities group into 611 LLMA: 225 in the North, 105 in the Centre, and 281 in the South and the Islands (or *Mezzogiorno*). This paper examines both the changes of residence⁵ taking place between the municipalities within the same LLMA and those involving moves between the LLMA.

Using a set of sociodemographic and socio-economic variables, Istat has classified the 611 LLMA into the following seven categories: the cities of the Centre-North, the dispersed city (of the Centre-North), the green heart (of the Centre-North), the southern urban centres, the territories of deprivation (of the South), the internal South, and the other South⁶ (Istat, 2015b). These categories are used here to summarise levels and trends more easily and to show a certain parallelism of the trends over the different national subdivisions, but broadly speaking, the first three categories comprising the Centre-North are much stronger economically than the four categories of the South, as is also reflected in the higher than average presence of the foreign population there (10.5% in the Centre-North against 3.8% in the *Mezzogiorno* at the end of the study period with a national average of 8.5%).

The estimated yearly rates of internal migration are averaged over three periods. The first, 2005–2008, identifies with the pre-crisis period, while 2009–2012 encompasses the years when the economic crisis deepened, and 2013–2016 sees some “normalisation” of internal migration patterns but cannot be yet defined as postcrisis.

In this paper, we seek to uncover further elements of the low internal migration intensities in Italy by using the gross migraproduction rate (GMR) (Bell et al., 2002; Rogers, 1975) as the measure of the intensity of internal migration. The GMR is defined as the sum of the age-group specific out-migration rates from age 0 to 74. This measure can be read as the hypothetical average number of moves by an individual over the lifetime⁷ applying the age-group specific rates observed in a specific period. The GMR is estimated by citizenship and gender, with all analysis in this contribution being

conducted separately for these groups. This way, the focus is on the behavioural component of internal migration, eliminating the effects of the different age structures of the population considered. To discuss the age patterns of internal migration the age-group specific rates⁸ are used, as well as the estimated mean age at migration based on these rates.

A further dimension taken into consideration is the distance migrated, here defined as the geodesic distance between the geographic centres of the single LLMA. Considering the functional criteria used to define this spatial framework, the geographic centre of an LLMA would be in most cases close to the population centre. The distance for intra-LLMA migration flows is estimated using the surface area of the single LLMA. These distance measures are used to distinguish between short- and long-distance moves with 50 km being the admittedly arbitrary criterion.⁹ Thus short-distance moves include most of the moves prompted by housing considerations, whereas long-distance moves, or interregional ones, should be linked mainly to changes of the place of work or study and involve a clear switch of daily activity space.

The more detailed empirical analysis of the Italian migration patterns refers to the internal out-migration rates and to the out-migration flow rates towards and from three selected Italian LLMA using the product of the populations at origin and at destination of the migration flows as denominators (Fielding, 1966).¹⁰ These internal out-migration rates are correlated with some of the factors that are hypothesised to influence the regional patterns of the internal migration intensities focusing on the level of general unemployment and of educational attainment, as well as the family formation behaviour of young adults.

All statistical analysis at the level of the 611 LLMA is based on weighted data by applying the total population.¹¹ Thus, the significant differences in the size of the single LLMA are taken into consideration. In fact, their size varies considerably from just above 3,000 inhabitants to about 3.5 million for the Rome LLMA and 3.7 million for the Milan LLMA in 2011. In what follows, the variation in LLMA size is also made apparent from the use of population-weighted cartograms.

3 | TRENDS AND REGIONAL PATTERNS OF THE INTENSITY AND TIMING OF INTERNAL MIGRATION IN ITALY

The patterning of Italy's migration intensities between 2002 and 2016 is presented in Figure 1. It shows clearly how, with the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, the previous tendency of a slight increase in rates came to a halt around then. The GMRs for Italian citizens had risen from close to 1,500 per thousand in 2002 to 1,700 per thousand in 2008, and this is similar for men and women. After 2008, GMR values declined sharply, but by 2016 had managed to recover to their pre-crises levels of 1,700 per thousand. As already mentioned (see Section 2), the 2012 spike should be ignored because it is due to a change in the registration

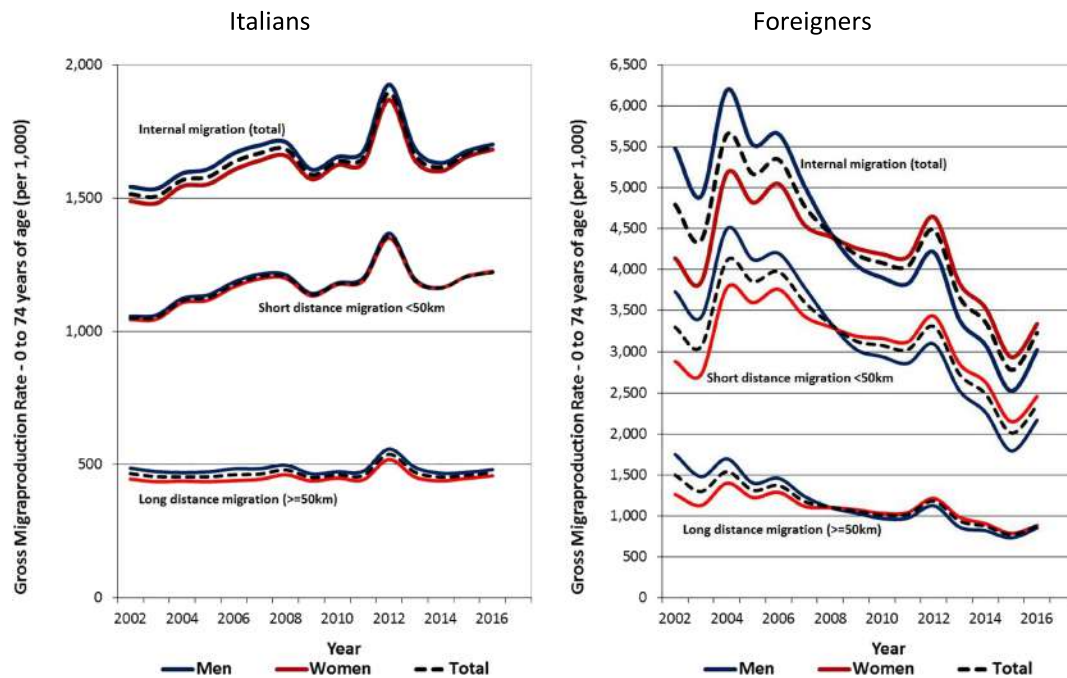


FIGURE 1 Gross migraproduction rate (GMR) by sociodemographic characteristics and periods. Total and short- and long-distance migrations, Italy 2002–2016 (per 1,000 persons). Source: Authors' calculation from Istat: "Iscrizioni e cancellazioni all'anagrafe per trasferimento di residenza"; population estimates by citizenship, gender, and age (<http://demo.istat.it/> and <http://demo.istat.it/ricostruzione2013/index.php>). Note: GMR is the sum of the age-group-specific out-migration rates for the age range 0 to 74 years and can be interpreted as the number of moves per 1,000 people with the specific sociodemographic characteristics over the life span expected on the basis of the information referring to the years under observation and assuming survival to age 75. Distances are estimated at the level of 611 local labour market areas (LLMAs)

process. Italy's economic crisis intensified after 2011 and cannot be considered to be over by 2016.

For the foreign population, the situation appears very different in terms of levels and trends of the GMR: after a value of 4,800 per thousand in 2002, it reaches 5,700 per thousand 2 years later and declines to 3,200 per thousand by 2016. The higher propensity to change residence of foreign citizens is probably due to the greater willingness or necessity to change place of work and living quarters more frequently. Until 2008, internal mobility of foreign men is higher than that of women.

During this period, the gender gap diminishes, and in the following years, the propensity to change residence of foreign women is persistently higher than that of foreign men. For the foreign population, the years of the Great Recession are dominated by the general process to becoming more settled in Italian society and to integrate.

Turning to the distinction between long- and short-distance moves (with the cut-off set at 50 km as mentioned in Section 2), it can be seen from Figure 1 that long-distance migration intensities seem to exhibit a more stable trend than short-distance ones. Short-distance migrations are 2–3 times more frequent than long-distance moves. For the Italian population, long-distance migrations represent around 30% of all intermunicipal changes of residence, whereas for the foreign population, this value ranges between 25% and 31%, increasing slightly towards the end of the study period. Short-distance migration intensities of the Italian population increased until 2008, then diminished with the economic crisis and did not recover to pre-

crisis levels before 2015. In relative terms, short- and long-distance moves show the same reaction to the onset of the economic crisis. This relationship is probably due to the repercussions for the real estate sector and especially the ensuing difficulties in obtaining mortgages. The worsening of the general economic situation in the following years did not seem to have similar effects. No differences in short-distance internal migration trends are observed between Italian men and women indicating the importance of the same set of motivations and factors for the residential moves. For Italians, gender differences are very small even for long-distance migration, showing that even in this case, the mobility drivers are quite similar between men and women. Obviously, this might be also linked to common decision taking in a couple or the trailing spouse (or tide mover) effect (Cooke, 2013). By contrast, in the case of the foreign population, sharp differences exist: in 2008, the trends for men and women for short and long distance cross over, with foreign women subsequently exhibiting markedly higher intensities. This is probably caused by the increasing role that unaccompanied foreign women, like from Ukraine, play in providing care to families, especially assisting older people and living with them in their homes. As a consequence, they change residence more frequently.

The differences between the pre-crisis period (2005–2008) and the most recent period (2013–2016) show only slight gains for the Italian population in the case of the short-distance migrations, whereas long-distance GMRs did not increase. Instead, for the foreign population, the trend towards lower levels of GMRs and a certain

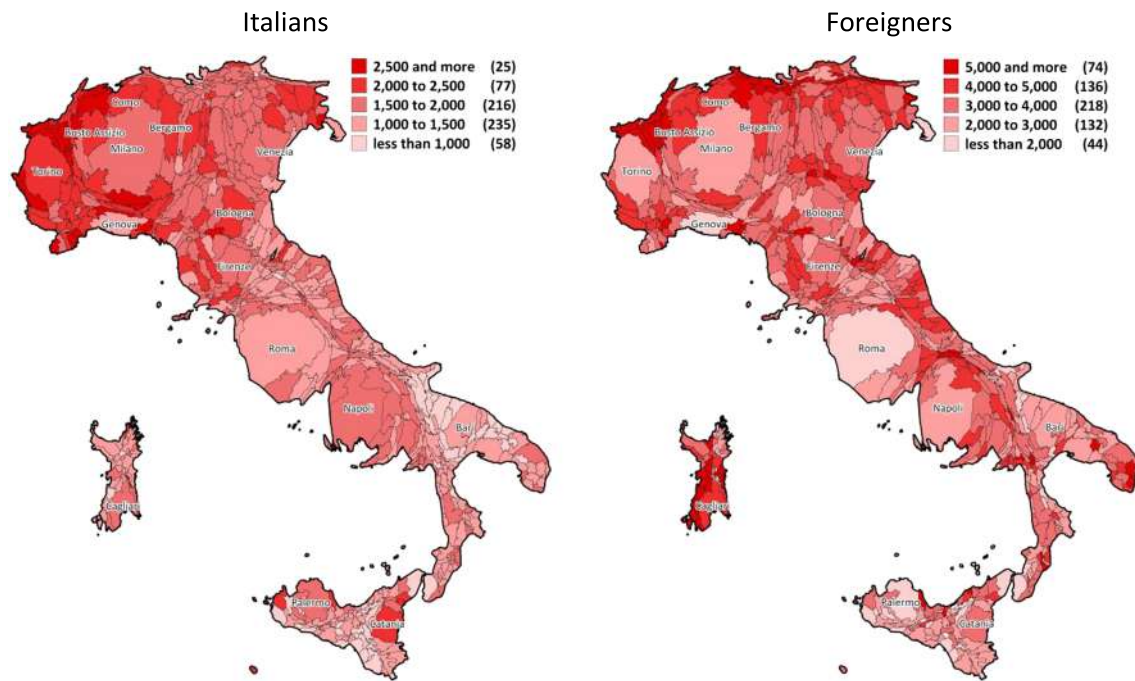


FIGURE 2 Total gross migraproduction rate (GMR) of Italians and foreigners by local labour market areas (LLMAs), Italy 2013–2016 (per 1,000 persons). Source and notes see Figure 1

normalisation or stabilisation is confirmed. The fall in GMRs is slightly greater in the case of long-distance migration.

The cartograms¹² of Figure 2 indicate that GMR values, both for Italian and foreign population, are generally higher in the northern part of Italy. Overall, lower internal migration intensities are observed in Liguria (the north-western coastal stretch around Genova), especially in the LLMA of Genova, and in some areas of the *Mezzogiorno*, especially in Apulia (the south-eastern region from the Gargano “spur” to the Salento peninsula) and Sicily. The size and the position in relation to important metropolitan areas of the single LLMAs are probably playing a role. In the case of Genova, the commuting patterns, and consequently the residential mobility flows, are determined by terrain, with the metropolitan area “squeezed” between the sea and the Apennine Mountains. The regional differences in the internal migration intensities of the Italian and foreign population are certainly determined by different processes. Whereas for the Italian population, the suburbanisation process plays an important role, even if halted by the economic crisis, in the case of the foreign population, this is probably less important.

The differences between the LLMA categories reflect the well-known imbalances between the South and the Centre-North (as indicated by the black line in Figure 2) and influence the diversity in trends shown in Figure 3. Focusing on the overall GMRs of the Italian population, the highest values are observed in the three categories of the Centre-North and in “The territories of deprivation” with negative net migration. The GMRs estimated for the Italian population show a slightly increasing trend for the different categories of LLMAs with the exception of those belonging to “The territories of deprivation” where internal migration has registered a peak in 2008 followed by lower values in subsequent years and for

those belonging to “The cities of the Centre-North” with decreasing GMRs since 2009. Even in some territorial categories, the GMR recovered slightly in the last year(s) of the study period. The most mobile persons lived in the LLMAs of the Centre-North belonging to the category “The green heart” with high internal migration intensities, followed by the LLMAs of “The dispersed city” and of “The internal South,” where, on the other hand, mobility is high because it is seemingly directed towards the most prosperous central-northern LLMAs. Lower internal migration propensities are observed for the LLMAs of “The other South” and of “The southern urban centres,” probably due to such a critical economic situation that it leads to migratory inertia.

The mobility of foreigners, unlike that of Italians, tends to decrease over the years for all categories of LLMAs. In the first part of the period, the GMRs differ considerably between the LLMA categories, but tend to converge in recent years towards similar paths and levels. Foreigners have higher GMRs in the LLMAs of “The internal South,” “The other South,” and “The southern urban centres.” By contrast, the low and constant levels of internal migration observed in “The cities of the Centre-North,” “The dispersed city,” and “The green heart” suggest a more stable and rooted presence of the foreign population in the northern regions.

Turning to the short-distance migration intensities, there is high variability in the GMR values across the LLMA categories, but the direction of the trends is rather similar over the study period. Not surprisingly, the Italian population of the LLMAs of the Centre-North show the highest levels of short-distance migration because these areas offer more opportunities and the available wealth increases the likelihood to realise moving intentions. Undoubtedly, in smaller, more deprived, and more peripheral areas, the motivations and

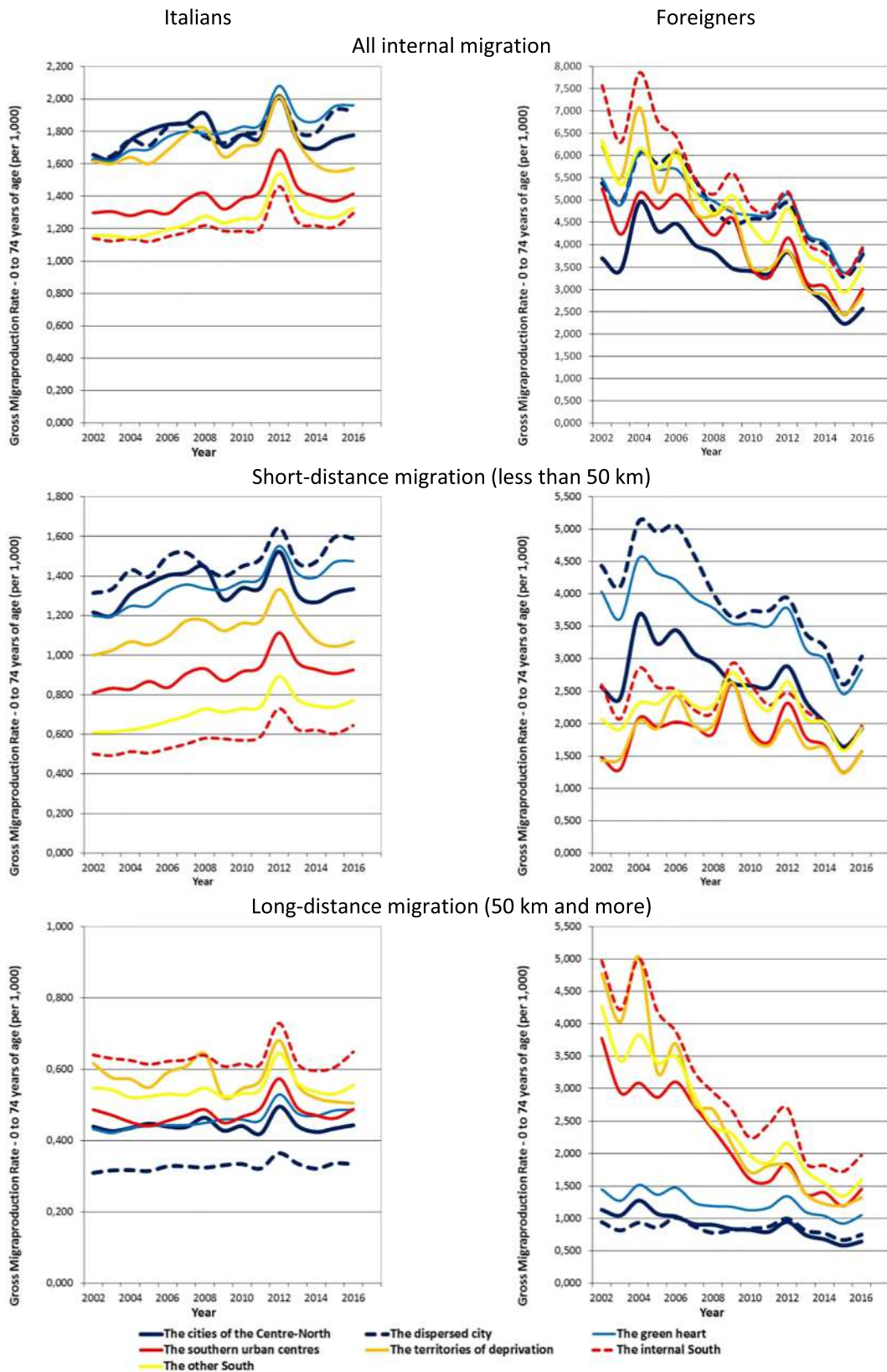


FIGURE 3 Gross migraproduction rate (GMR) of Italians and foreigners by categories of local labour market areas (LLMAs) and distance categories, Italy 2002–2016 (per 1,000 persons). Source and notes: see Figure 1

opportunities to change residence are lower. The onset of the economic crisis leads seemingly to a relatively sharp decline of intensities in the category “The cities of the Centre-North” that appears like an adjustment after a relative strong increase in the previous years. In the case of Rome, for example, Crisci (2017) observed a slowdown or even a reversal of a previous trend of suburbanisation. This might be due to the interaction of demographic factors, high priced and speculative real estate developments in relatively peripheral areas, and the contraction of the real estate financing. Also for the foreign population, higher levels of short-distance migration are observed in the Centre-North. However, the decline in the central-northern categories is more pronounced, and today, the levels of short-distance migration of “The cities of the Centre-North” equal those of the southern categories that have only decreased slightly. The foreign population started settling in Italy in the metropolitan and other urban areas, especially in central and northern Italy, and it is precisely in these areas that the trend towards lower levels of these moves can be observed. As for the Italian population, the highest GMRs are observed in “The dispersed city,” followed by “The southern urban centres” and “The cities of the Centre-North.”

As regards long-distance migration intensities, the order of the categories is almost the direct opposite: the residents of “The internal South” have the highest GMRs, whereas the residents of the metropolitan and urban areas of the Centre-North exhibit the lowest values. In the case of the Italian population, a response to the crisis can be identified in the case of “The territories of deprivation,” with a decrease in rates that appears to be a correction of an earlier increase

during the years 2005–2008. In the other categories of LLMA, little variation can be observed (apart from the artificially inflated value for 2012). In the LLMA categories with a lower incidence of the foreign population, a general and continuous decline of the long-distance GMRs of the foreign population is observed, whereas in all three categories of northern Italy, the foreign population displays quite stable, slightly decreasing GMR values over the study period. The relatively positive economic situation, better services, and higher economic investments in Centre-North categories seem to lead to lower long-distance out-migration rates.

The regional patterns of the long-distance internal migration intensities (Figure 4) differ significantly from those referring to the total internal migration (Figure 2). Smaller and more peripherally located LLMA seem to have a more mobile population. With increasing distance to a metropolitan area or difficult terrain making long-distance commuting more difficult, the long-distance GMRs tend to be higher. This is the case in central and northern Italy, especially in the *Mezzogiorno*, and touches areas that are situated in the northern, central and southern Apennine Hills, western Liguria, southern Tuscany, and peripheral areas of the South. The cartograms of Figure 4 give a very different view of the internal migration patterns in Italy compared with the ones of net migration rates that would simply oppose the southern and the central-northern division of Italy. Certain similarities between the regional patterns of the Italian and foreign populations are observed even if at very different levels of GMR, indicating common factors like geographical position and accessibility. The wider Milan area and other areas of the North East, as well as

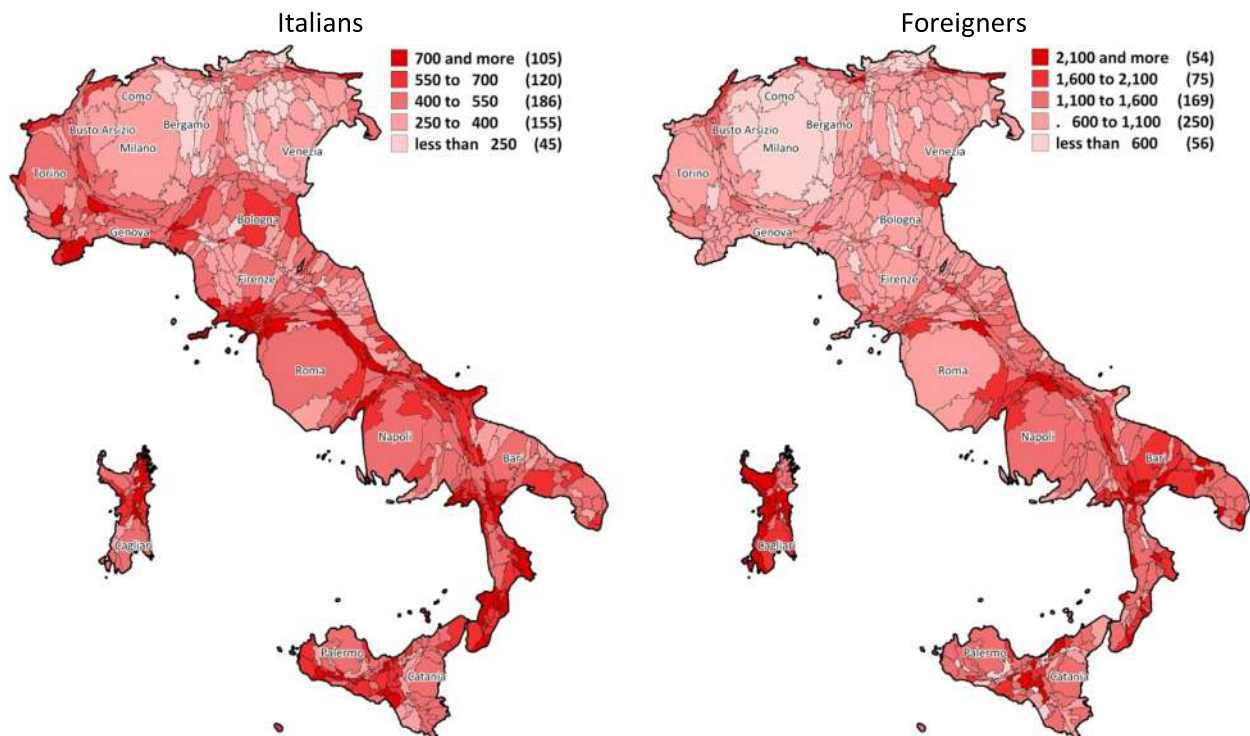


FIGURE 4 Gross migration rate (GMR) for long-distance internal migration (50 km and more) of Italians and foreigners by local labour market areas (LLMAs), Italy 2013–2016 (per 1,000 persons). Source and notes: see Figure 1

few areas of the *Mezzogiorno*, show low GMRs contributing to the relatively low internal mobility intensities in Italy.

Disaggregation by age provides further insights in the characteristics of the processes of internal migration. In general terms, mean age does not vary much between the two distance categories or seems to be less sensitive to distance, even if gender differences and differences by citizenship are important. The foreign population has generally a higher mean age of changing residence (38.1 years in 2013–2016 up from 35.0 years in 2005–2008). Among the Italian population (31.9 years in both periods), women have a slightly lower mean age (31.2 against 32.5 years for men), whereas among the foreign population, it is higher for women (38.8 against 36.5 years for men in the last period). As expected, the mean age is higher in the case of long-distance migration (31.7 and 32.7 years for short- and long-distance moves, respectively, for the Italian population and 37.9 and 38.5 years for the foreign population). Over the study period, mean age does not change significantly for the Italian population, whereas it rises for the foreign population, especially for foreign women.

As regards the detailed age pattern of all-distances migration (Figure 5), that of Italians is relatively concentrated in the age groups that can be described as young adults and it is almost constant over time, with the typical age pattern characterised by high values during the first years of life, low in the years of schooling, and high in the age groups of economic activity and especially family formation, and also is substantially the same for men and women. For foreigners, the age pattern is in most cases less regular compared with that of Italians, characterised by a single peak for young adults. The reasons for these different age patterns are anchored again in their more precarious living conditions.

The age pattern of internal migration by citizenship and gender changes considerably between the pre-crisis period 2005–2008 and the years of economic stagnation 2013–2016. After 2008, the financial crisis and the general economic situation with higher unemployment rates affect migration flows, especially among the most vulnerable groups like the foreigners. The internal migration of foreign men aged 20–34 years decreased between the two periods, while the mobility of foreign women decreased less, with a gender gap becoming evident for the 20–24 and 55–59 groups due to the special two-peaked age profile.

The age-group specific out-migration rates calculated over short and long distances show similar patterns but at different magnitudes. For both distance categories, the double peak shape of the age patterns of foreign women is confirmed. Interestingly, the rates in the first years of life in the case of the foreign population are relatively low compared with the one of the young adults and considering the relationship observed for the Italian population.

In the case of short-distance out-migration rates for the Italian population, no significant spatial disparities are observed suggesting that the age patterns of residential moves and their motivations follow an Italian standard. However, for Italian women, the profiles are more pronounced with higher peaks especially in the central northern LLMA. As expected, the gender differences are negligible in the young age groups, but play a role in the older ones.

Also for the long-distance internal migrations of the Italian population, for most LLMA, an Italian standard can be observed. However, in a few metropolitan LLMA including Rome's, the internal out-migration rates at retirement age are significantly higher, whereas in a few other LLMA—often located in the *Mezzogiorno*—a clear peak for the 25–34 is observed. This observation would fit into the discussion of out-migration of the young from the *Mezzogiorno*, but indicating at the same time the geographically limited validity of the argument because this group is representing only a smaller part of southern Italy.

4 | THE REGIONAL DRIVERS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION INTENSITIES IN ITALY

Several contributions (e.g., Champion et al., 2018, especially Green, 2018) offer overviews of the determinants of internal migration and the causes of declining internal migration intensities in developed countries. In Italy, the forces that discourage internal migration are stronger and more persuasive than those that drive moves. The most important one is the strong family ties that dominate Italian society (Dalla Zuanna, 2001; De Rose & Vignoli, 2011) and substitute for the very weak public welfare system. Another is that in recent decades, the relatively low activity rates of women have increased,¹³ lowering the propensity of families to migrate as dual-earner families have become more frequent in order to guarantee a sufficient family income and to satisfy the labour market aspirations of women (Istat, 2019a). Also the relatively high share of owner occupiers in Italy might contribute to lower out-migration rates. The share of owner occupiers decreased slightly between 2005 and 2016, a fact that might be linked to the increasing number of foreign residents in Italy that do not (yet) have access to ownership or are not interested in becoming owners (Blangiardo, Conti, Quattrociochi, Terzera, & Ortensi, 2017). This section discusses in more detail the specific groups of factors influencing Italy's low internal migration intensities, taking a regional perspective where appropriate.

Internal migration is imbedded in the decisions regarding the life course (Bernard, Bell, & Charles-Edwards, 2015; Mulder, 1993), with the most obvious one being about leaving the family home. Italy is one of the countries with the most delayed nest-leaving behaviour (Aassve, Billari, Mazzucco, & Ongaro, 2002; Billari & Liefbroer, 2010; Billari & Tabellini, 2010). Regarding traditional family structures, important regional differences can be observed. Young adults living in Emilia and in the university towns of the Centre-North are less likely to be living with their parents than young adults residing in the South, especially Sardinia, and in some areas of the North like the *Alto Adige* or *South Tyrol*.¹⁴

The traditional economic drivers of internal migration seem to play a different role in Italy. Imperfections and rigidities in labour and housing markets seem to be important forces that impede migration, while the steep increase in the price of housing after 2006¹⁵ lowered the number of transactions then, well before the onset of the economic crisis. Later, the number of transactions decreased even further

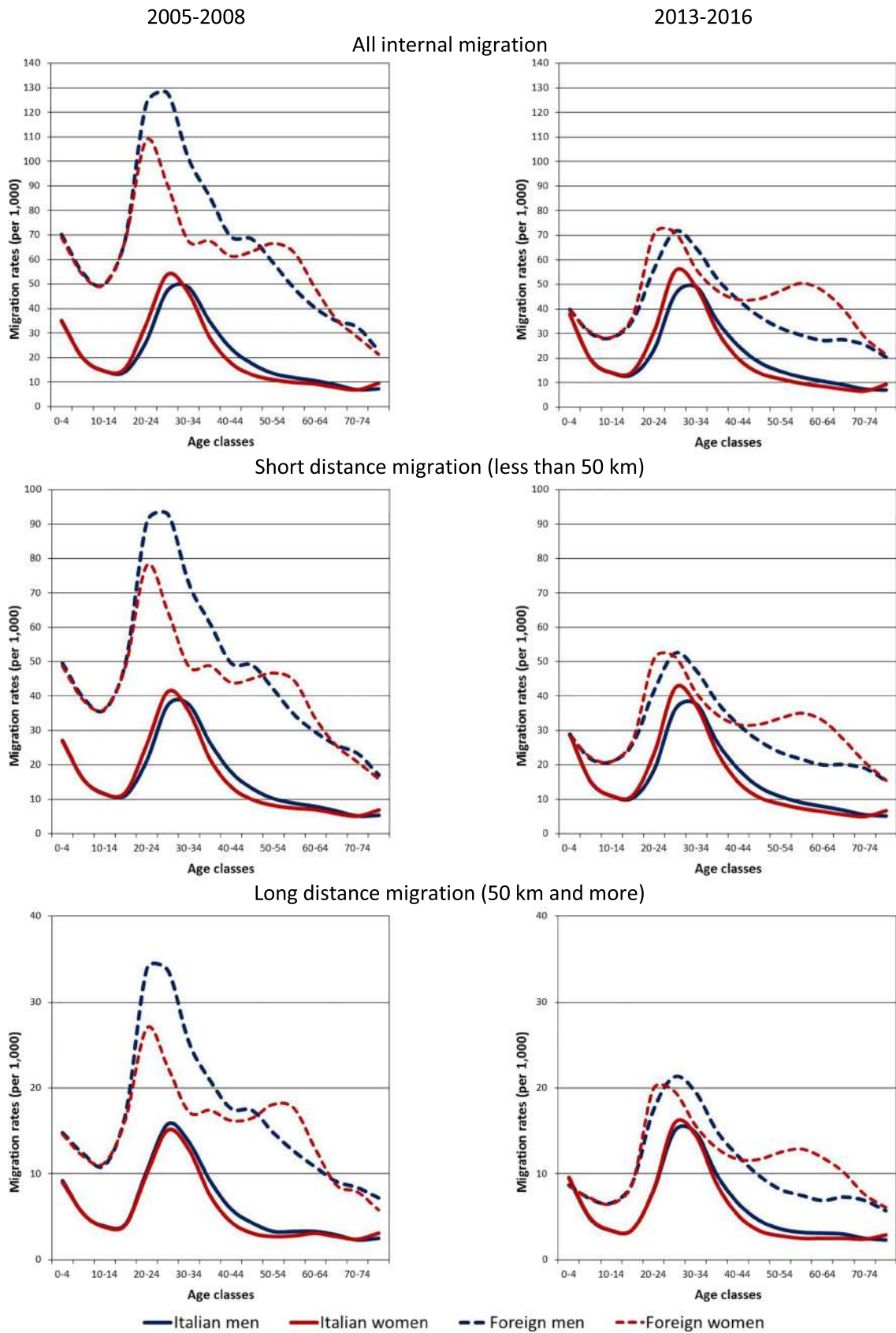


FIGURE 5 Internal out-migration rates by age groups of Italians and foreigners by distance categories, Italy 2005–2008 and 2013–2016 (rates per 1,000). Source and notes: see Figure 1

TABLE 1 Weighted correlation coefficients of the regional patterns between selected “socio-economic variables” and internal out-migration rates by distance categories, Italy 2013–2016 (611 LLMAAs)

Distance category	Distance (standardised)	Percentage students (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage unemployment rate (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in the primary sector (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in manufacturing (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in public administration (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage living in a household with parents (age group 20 to 44)
All internal migration							
GMR Italian population	-0.693	-0.556	-0.383	-0.424	±0.440	-0.451	-0.522
Migration rate Italians 25–29	-0.678	-0.652	-0.525	-0.386	±0.622	-0.598	-0.597
Migration rate Italians 30–34	-0.692	-0.553	-0.488	-0.410	±0.547	-0.530	-0.530
GMR foreign population							
Migration rate foreigners 25–29	-0.502	-0.334	-0.305	-0.161	±0.475	-0.383	-0.106
Migration rate foreigners 30–34	-0.444	-0.244	-0.204	-0.119	±0.442	-0.339	
Short-distance migration (less than 50 km)							
GMR Italian population	-0.271	-0.650	-0.471	-0.468	±0.563	-0.571	-0.565
Migration rate Italians 25–29	-0.263	-0.740	-0.614	-0.450	±0.690	-0.700	-0.652
Migration rate Italians 30–34	-0.267	-0.692	-0.574	-0.479	±0.650	-0.660	-0.607
GMR foreign population							
Migration rate foreigners 25–29	-0.374	-0.576	-0.571	-0.313	±0.664	-0.631	-0.379
Migration rate foreigners 30–34	-0.384	-0.523	-0.500	-0.277	±0.625	-0.598	-0.335
Long-distance migration (50 km and more)							
GMR Italian population	±0.225	±0.499	±0.423	±0.286	-0.562	±0.556	±0.314
Migration rate Italians 25–29	±0.133	±0.657	±0.471	±0.388	-0.549	±0.622	±0.463
Migration rate Italians 30–34	±0.421	±0.566	±0.554	±0.409	-0.355	±0.488	±0.704

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Distance category	Distance (standardised)	Percentage students (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage unemployment rate (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in the primary sector (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in manufacturing (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in public administration (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage living in a household with parents (age group 20 to 44)
Internal out-migration rates and GMRs (gross migration rates)	±0.284	±0.381	±0.423	±0.245	-0.275	±0.385	±0.456
Migration rate foreigners 25–29							
Migration rate foreigners 30–34	±0.412	±0.514	±0.545	±0.291	-0.338	±0.478	±0.621

Source: Authors' calculation on Istat data.

Note: All variables considered at the LLMA level; socio-economic variables refer to 2011 census. All correlation coefficients reported are significant at the 0.01 level. Abbreviation: LLMA, local labour market areas.

as the crisis deepened in 2011 and 2012. In our opinion, the general negative outlook and the climate of uncertainty, as well as the credit or lending squeeze by banks, are contributing factors.

The economic recession that took hold of Italy after 2008 does not appear to have changed the geographical pattern of economic performance and unemployment, though the first years of the economic crisis saw a decrease in internal migration, especially in some metropolitan areas. Fundamentally, the disparities between the potential areas of out-migration and those of in-migration remained unchanged (Svimez, 2019). However, the recession increased the propensity to migrate abroad and also brought an increase in poverty rates. Between 2005 and 2016, the share of individuals in absolute poverty rose from 3.3% to 7.9%, with its incidence being highest in the *Mezzogiorno* at 9.8% in 2016. Households and individuals in poverty lack the financial resources to invest in an internal move to improve their situation.

Educational attainment is very often linked at the individual level to higher internal migration intensities because of the professional opportunities created by higher education. The higher migration propensities after completing studies might also be due to moves that took place previously when starting studying. In fact, many migratory moves seem to be linked to the decision of young adults to continue with a tertiary education (e.g., Impicciatore & Tuorto, 2011).

International migration also influences Italy's internal migration trends, especially with newly arriving immigrants having higher migration intensities than Italians and those foreigners already established in Italian society. Over the last two decades, immigration led to relatively high internal migration intensities of the foreign population due to the process of "finding their ways" into Italian society. However, in recent years, the number of foreign residents has stabilised as well as their migration intensities, as shown in Figure 1.

For Italians, emigration—especially to European countries—is often an attractive alternative to internal migration because it seems to be easier to undertake than moving within Italy because of more favourable conditions of the labour and housing markets elsewhere, as well as existing networks of family and friends there. The number of Italians that emigrated increased from 40,000 in 2010 to 120,000 in 2018¹⁶ (Istat, 2019b). Unlike in the past, the areas of origin are no longer concentrated in the South, but extend today also to Central-Northern Italy. The greater international mobility within the EU could be a sign of the process of European integration that the economic crisis has facilitated (Livi Bacci, 2014; Strozza & Tucci, 2018).

Because it is the regional variation in internal migration intensities that is the primary concern of this paper, it is disappointing to note that patterns observed in the previous section, notably in Figures 2 and 4, do not reveal any clear link with known socio-economic disparities. On the contrary, short-distance migration intensities seem to be influenced, perhaps not surprisingly, by the administrative subdivision of the specific territories, whereas those of the long-distance migration seem to be influenced by the existence of alternatives to moving home like commuting, with lower migration intensities in LLMA around the metropolitan areas.

TABLE 2 Weighted correlation coefficients between selected “socio-economic variables” and long-distance internal migration flow rates, Milan, Rome, and Naples

Selected long-distance migration flow rates (at least 50 km)	Socio-economic variables at origin/destination of flow							
	Distance	Distance ²	Percentage students (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage unemployment rate (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in the primary sector (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in manufacturing (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage employed in public administration (age group 20 to 64)	Percentage living in a household with parents (age group 20 to 44)
Destination Milan								
Italians	+0.386	+0.433	+0.355	+0.381	+0.252	-0.401	+0.370	+0.282
Origin Milan								
Italians	-0.172	-0.102	-0.194	-0.133	-0.060	-0.127	-0.119	-0.215
Foreigners	-0.203	-0.155	-0.186	-0.178	-0.132	+0.036	-0.135	-0.135
Destination Rome								
Italians	-0.521	-0.432	+0.443	+0.270	+0.151	-0.345	+0.394	+0.391
Foreigners	-0.369	-0.303	+0.270	+0.222	-0.270	-0.237	+0.289	+0.276
Origin Rome								
Italians	-0.483	-0.392	+0.072	-0.022	-0.029	-0.174	+0.091	+0.085
Foreigners	-0.192	-0.151	+0.061	-0.087	-0.042	-0.099	+0.115	+0.064
Destination Naples								
Italians	-0.314	-0.267	+0.144	+0.153	+0.127		+0.137	+0.136
Foreigners	-0.130	-0.117	+0.141					
Origin Naples								
Italians	-0.144	-0.075	+0.150	+0.038	-0.125	-0.049	+0.072	+0.054
Foreigners	-0.043		+0.111	+0.103		-0.042	+0.099	+0.101
Italy								
Italians	-0.100	-0.057						
Foreigners	-0.014	-0.010						

Source: Authors' calculation on Istat data.

Note: All variables considered at the local labour market area (LLMA) level; independent variables refer to 2011 census. All correlation coefficients reported are significant at the 0.01 level.

Following earlier argumentation (Bonifazi et al., 2018) and the observation of the late nest leaving of young Italian adults, it was expected that the patterns of internal migration intensities would closely follow the regional disparities in the economic situation or the nest-leaving process, but this does not seem to be the case according to the results of exploratory correlation analysis of the regional patterns of internal migration intensities and of selected socio-economic characteristics of the LLMA of origin that we now go on to describe.

Table 1 presents selected results from this correlation analysis. Here, the weighted correlation coefficients over the 611 LLMA between the standardised distance and the GMRs and internal out-migration rates have the expected negative sign indicating the sensitivity of internal migration regarding distance. In the case of the Italian population, this sensitivity seems to be higher than for foreigners. However, considering only long-distance migration flows, the clear negative association is not observed anymore and coefficients turn positive in the case of the foreign population. The long-distance moves seem not to be so sensitive to distance any more. This is one of the paradoxes demonstrated earlier through the importance of the South–North migration flows for the Italian migration system. The share of students in a LLMA seems to lower the overall migration intensities. However, when focusing on the long-distance intensities, the association becomes positive, indicating higher intensities over long distance when the share of students in the population of the LLMA of origin is higher. As in the previous results, those regarding the geographic differences of the unemployment rates call for a separate analysis of short- and long-distance migration: for the former, unemployment has a negative association, whereas for long-distance moves, higher unemployment in a LLMA has a positive relationship with migration intensities. Distinguishing between the two distance categories solves the paradox of a negative association observed not only for Italy in the past. The economic structure of the different LLMA is also related to long-distance intensities, higher when characterised by agriculture or public administration and lower when characterised by the manufacturing sector. In the case of the late leaving of the parental home, the correlation coefficients have the expected sign for overall intensities, whereas for long-distance migration, they are moderately positive, that is, contrary to expected. Overall, the correlation coefficients are only of moderate magnitude, signalling the need for prudence when including these indices in an internal migration model.

Table 2 looks in more detail at the factors influencing long-distance migration intensities for Italy's three major metropolitan areas. The role of distance¹⁷ varies between them, with modestly positive correlation coefficients in the case of Milan as a destination and negative coefficients in all other cases. Milan seems to lose attractiveness with distance of about 400 km to become again slightly more attractive for more distant LLMA. At the same time, a large part of migration flows to Milan appear to be of little importance and independent of distance, an observation that has general validity. In the case of Milan as the origin, as well as Rome and Naples, migration intensities do not increase again at longer distances. Obviously, the distribution

and the maximum values of the observed distances between the LLMA vary depending on their geographic location. Regarding the socio-economic factors, sizeable correlation coefficients are observed only in the case of migration flow intensities of Italians towards Milan and Rome. A higher share of students and higher unemployment rates in the LLMA of origin show moderately positive values. Employment in public administration and late leaving of the parental home also show positive correlation coefficients, but again only rather moderate ones. By contrast, employment in manufacturing is generally associated negatively with migration flow intensities at origin and at destination. For Naples, only the coefficients of the distance are sizeable, but are still low, undermining the idea of distance dependence.

These results indicate the difficulties in building and estimating straightforward models to “explain” regional differences of internal migration intensities.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

Italians have a low propensity for migrating within their country, but the increase in the number of foreigners living there has worked to raise the level of internal migration in recent decades (Bonifazi et al., 2012). Even so, the latter's migration intensity has been diminishing as the situation of foreign residents has become more stable. Moreover, the Great Recession that has affected Italy more intensely and for a longer time than most other countries has contributed to the decrease of internal migration of foreigners who in many cases have preferred an onward move to migrating within Italy.

The decision to analyse short- and long-distance migration separately has proved very useful, even if the analysis carried out at the macro level highlights the difficulties faced in “explaining” the geographic differences in the intensities of internal migrations through socio-economic variables. The available information suggests that the reality of internal migration, at least for Italy in the current situation, seems to be in a certain way plain because internal migration intensities are so low that there is very little room for regional differences not determined by the more obvious motives of the changes of residence linked to the life course. The “basic” events of the life course like cohabitation and forming a couple or adapting housing needs to the changing family size are getting ever more important, leaving little room for residential choices motivated by education, work, and leisure.

At the same time, explaining the geographic patterns of internal migration is rather complicated because factors in a local context do not always affect the internal migration intensities in the same way. For example, the patterns of the unemployment rates correlate positively with the indices of internal migration intensities in some cases but negatively in others. Similarly, regional measures of late nest-leaving behaviour show different effects on internal migration for different places. Even regarding the well-accepted factor of distance between the origin and the destination of the internal migration flows, the observations for the metropolitan LLMA indicate contradictory results in the case of Italy. A few migration flow intensities even vary positively with distance, others seem to be independent of distance,

and many others correspond to the expected, more or less negative, relationship between distance and migratory intensity. By contrast, the impact of two alternatives to internal migration seems to affect internal migration significantly and increasingly, one being commuting and the other being international emigration that is considered ever more frequently especially by young adults. Thus, the challenge of future research on migration and mobility would be the realisation of a comprehensive approach, including choosing immobility.

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ENDNOTES

¹The expression Third Italy was coined in the 1970s (Bagnasco A., 1977, *Tre Italie: la problematica territoriale dello sviluppo Italiano*. Bologna, Il Mulino.) and describes specialised clusters of small- and medium-sized firms in the North East (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-South Tyrol, and Veneto) and in the Centre (Marche, Tuscany, and Umbria). The first and second Italy were, respectively, the North West characterised by industrial mass production and the less developed South. The term Third Italy is certainly outmoded, but it is still useful to identify the economic, social, and cultural characteristics of the areas.

²“Foreign population” is understood as the resident population with a non-Italian citizenship. In recent years, the number of naturalisations increased: from 94,000 in 2013 to 185,000 in 2016, diminishing thereafter.

³See <http://demo.istat.it/> and <http://demo.istat.it/ricostruzione2013/index.php> for total and foreign population.

⁴Decree-Law February 9, 2012 N. 5, converted into law April 4, 2012 N. 35 regarding urgent provisions on simplification and development—procedures for the application of Art. 5 *Cambio di residenza in tempo reale* (Change of residence in real time).

⁵Changes of residence in the same municipality are not part of the statistical data used.

⁶In Italian: *Le città del Centro-Nord, La città diffusa, Il cuore verde, I centri urbani meridionali, I territori del disagio, Il Mezzogiorno interno, and L'altro Sud*.

⁷To avoid effects of selective mortality and of distortions due to migration in old age “lifetime” is limited to 0 to 74 years of age.

⁸Whereas complex indices (GMRs) are estimated even for smaller LLMA, out-migration rates for age classes are reported only where at least 100 changes of residence per year are observed for the single category.

⁹The authors experimented with different values but did not observe significant differences in the results.

¹⁰Fielding (1966) uses the term “migration velocity”.

¹¹The total population of the 2011 population census.

¹²The cartogram shows the LLMA's scaled according to the total population of the 2011 population census.

¹³Statistical information in this section is taken from <http://dati.istat.it/Index.aspx>.

¹⁴Based on data of the 2011 Population and Housing Census and the yearly Labour Force Survey.

¹⁵Data are based on the “Sondaggio congiunturale sul mercato delle abitazioni in Italia” of the Banca d'Italia.

¹⁶Data retrieved from <http://demo.istat.it/altridati/trasferimenti/index.html>. However, Italians born abroad, foreigners who acquired the Italian citizenship, play an important role among these emigrants, varying between 19% and 29%.

¹⁷The distance was used in its simple and squared form to show that its results are not depending so much on the distance function used.

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